

MARY GORING.

CONTINUED.

III.

Something came into our dwelling, for William Elliot hastened down, and laid his purpose before us for Mary. I could not believe my own ears. He frankly stated that Sir Thomas and Lady Elliot were not cordially inclined to the match, for they had looked to his choosing rank and wealth; but they had not withheld their consent; and, he was certain, Mary would soon win her way to their entire love. Perhaps this was as much as Mary could have hoped for—indeed, more, for in point of worldly greatness William Elliot was above her. I suggested that they should not marry until the "entire love" of Sir Thomas Elliot and his wife had been obtained; but Mr. William laughed at me, and of course Mary thought with him. They were both in a maze of enchantment, and common sense was put out of the question.

For a few weeks our house was the pleasantest of the pleasant. Preparations were set on foot for the approaching union. Mary's things were bought, and Mr. William took a pretty abode in the Regent's Park. He did adopt my advice in one particular, and that was, to begin life in a small way, more in accordance with his own than his father's income. A good fortune must come to him at the demise of Sir Thomas and Lady Elliot, but they might live many years. So he agreed to set off in a very modest style—for him—though I thought it a sufficiently sumptuous one. One man and two maid-servants—no carriage, only Mr. William's horse, which he said he could not give up. All! what delightful discussions we had on those warm evenings, not one of which did Mr. William ever fail to spend with us. He had discovered that dining in the middle of the day was good for his constitution, and never felt well, he protested, without an early tea, which he could not get at home, so begged leave to join ours. It was quite an every day thing, now, for us to take it in the drawing room. I don't know whether Mary saw through his depth about his constitution, and his early tea, but I did, and was pleased, and a merry party we used to make. Sometimes he would get me to give Mary a lesson in house-keeping, and set himself to lecture with a serious face, while all the time those handsome eyes of his would be dancing with merriment: "About legs of mutton, and apple tarts," he would say, which would send Frances Goring off in fits of laughter, almost as bad as poor Clara Elliot's. I would sometimes give them an opportunity of being alone together—for I remembered my own early days, and the rapture that was mine when I had a solitary moment with George Archer. I limited their interviews to three minutes; at the last tick of the third, in I would pop to the drawing room again, which speed, I believe, rather exasperated Mr. William. One evening, as soon as tea was over, he asked me to let Mary go out walking with him, but I declined, and offered myself instead; and he never asked me again. Not, I hope, that any one will suppose I thought ill of William Elliot. A more honorable young man than William Elliot never breathed, and I could have trusted Mary with him anywhere; but my dear mother brought me up to observe these punctilious manners, and I cannot get out of them. But they did not want for opportunities of being alone together. Mary was occasionally invited with Clara to spend the day at Lady Elliot's—who, I may mention, was growing less cool to her with every visit—more like what she had used to be before she knew of her son's preference. From Goring's own surgery—at least, such was the conclusion drawn, for he kept some there; though whether the bottle had been touched or not, he could not himself tell. Mrs. Goring had dined, and was asleep on her bed, the nurse having gone to her dinner. During her absence the poison was introduced into a glass of water, which was as customary, stood at the bedside, and Mrs. Goring, when she awoke, drank it. Goring was in the garden the whole of this time, never came into the house at all, as the servants testified, until aroused by the screams in Mrs. Goring's room. Miss Howard was in the dining room, which adjoined the surgery, and the servants equally testified that if she had quitted it to go upstairs, they must have heard her. So the case was wrapped in mystery, and remains so.

"The worst feature was, Dr. Goring's marrying the woman afterwards," observed Sir Warburton.

"Marrying her! the governess!" exclaimed Sir Thomas Elliot.

"I don't know what other people may have done," interposed Dr. Ashe, warmly. "I had my opinion upon the point, and always shall have. But it does not do to speak out one's opinions too freely. There was no proof."

"What was this governess suspected?" inquired Sir Thomas Elliot.

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"I think he said more; but I was too grieved, too stunned, I may say, to remember what it was. I only know he temporarily broke off the negotiation for an alliance with Mary Goring. I watched him get into his carriage from the window, and I don't know that my heart had ever failed me so painfully in my life. How was I to take it to Mary?

I did not know, though I pondered over it all that livelong day. When evening comes, and she finds it does not bring him, I repeated to myself, how can I ever say to her, "Not only this evening is he absent, but for all others?" It will break her heart. Lucy wondered why I absented myself from the schoolroom, and I could not muster courage to tell her. So the evening came, and I had said nothing, but it brought Mr. William Elliot. I called out to the servants to show him into the dining room, not to let him come upstairs, and then ran down myself. "Oh, Mr. William!" I uttered—and for the very life of me I could not help bursting into tears—what is to be done?

He took my hands kind as ever, but his own were unsteady, and his face wore an unnatural paleness.

"What does Mary say? How does she bear it?" were his first words.

I have not dared to tell her. I did not know how."

"That is well. She had better hear it from me."

"From you! Oh no, Mr. Elliot."

"Believe me, yes," he firmly rejoined. "None can soothe it to her in the telling as I can."

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"Let me see her," he resumed.

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"And pined in silence," added Mr. Warburton, "for he never would acknowledge himself ill."

"I see, gentlemen," returned Sir Thomas, "it was a bad affair altogether, from beginning to end; one not too well calculated to bear the light of day."

"At any rate the light of the day has never been thrown upon it," answered Dr. Ashe.

"And the daughter of such a man shall never become William's wife," mentally concluded Sir Thomas Elliot. "But, to go back to the next room, gentlemen," he added, "My opinion—"

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"What sort of a man was Dr. Goring?" he suddenly said. "Respectable Poplar."

"Very much so," was the reply of Dr. Ashe.

"Until that nasty business occurred about his wife," broke in Mr. Warburton. "He lost both respect and popularity then."

"What business was that?" inquired Sir Thomas.

"She was recovering from an illness—one of the most lively women you ever saw in fact, all but well," observed Dr. Ashe. "I had seen her in the morning—for I attended her with all her children—and told her that the next day she might move

into the drawing room. That was about eleven o'clock. By five in the afternoon she was dead."

"What from?" inquired the physician.

"Poison," echoed Sir Thomas Elliot.

"Strichnia. Not a common poison then."

"By whom administered?"

"There was the question," said Dr. Ashe.

"It has never been cleared up from that day to this. With some people, poor Dr. Goring got the credit of it; but I believe he was innocent. Mary would soon win her way to their entire love. Perhaps this was as much as Mary could have hoped for—indeed, more, for in point of worldly greatness William Elliot was above her. I suggested that they should not marry until the "entire love" of Sir Thomas Elliot and his wife had been obtained; but Mr. William laughed at me, and of course Mary thought with him. They were both in a maze of enchantment, and common sense was put out of the question.

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